

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 8-20-17

August 20 we will study Ephesians 1:3-4. Discussion questions are:

1. At what moments in your life are you most prone to feel God is blessing others more than you?
2. What does a blessing from God look like?
3. How does Jeremiah 1:5 make you feel?
4. If you were hypnotized at a family reunion and told to reveal your most sinful thoughts and behaviors how would your family respond?
  - a. Is that the way God responds?
5. What did you think of John Piper's description of God singing over us?
6. Were you ever chosen for a special honor as a child? If so how did it make you feel?
  - a. Do you feel special in the eyes of God?
7. Why do you think Jesus asked the lame man if he wanted to be healed?
8. How does it make you feel to realize you are the focus of God's love (Eph 1:4)
9. Make a list of all the blessings God has bestowed on your class members.

### Sermon: *Chosen For Blessing*

Silence! It hung in the air like a cloud. The noise of the day had subsided and most of the people had gone. Only a few hopefuls lingered.

One man stayed where he had been all day long. He was in no hurry to leave since he had to wait for others to take him away. And when he did leave, he did so only to go home and wait to return tomorrow. Yes he knew he would return. He always did. It was the only hope he had. And yet he had *very little hope*.

The place to which he came each day was called the Pool of Bethesda. Bethesda means "house of mercy or lovingkindness." It was supposed to be a place of great blessing. No wonder it drew so many people who were lame, blind, and diseased. And those who came clung to the hope that they would receive mercy and be healed.

The lame man started coming her years ago. At first he came occasionally, then daily. The days blended into weeks, weeks became months, and months grew into years. One after another they rolled by, but he experienced no change, no blessing. After 38 years, his hope for blessing was just as crippled as his legs.

Time and time again he saw the calm surface of the pool move with a slight ripple that soon began to bubble and churn – stirred by an angel, people said. The afflicted around him rushed into the pool to submerge in the healing power they believed was present at that moment. Some people testified that God blessed them and set them free. "Why not me?" the man agonized. But day after day nothing changed. Today and tomorrow would be like yesterday. He felt unblessed.

His story isn't unique. Many people today find themselves stuck in life, unblessed. Their hope has eroded and they feel that life will always be this way. Like the man at the pool, they see others receiving God's touch of blessing and wonder why it doesn't happen to them. Perhaps some of them are just like you. In counseling it is quite common for someone to come in and describe how their hope is gone and their fear is that life will always be this way. And the folks who voice such hopelessness are not just the "down and out" but they are often well dressed, drive nice cars, and even attend church frequently. But still they feel empty. They ask: "Why are others blessed and not me?"; "Why are others able to sell their homes and mine has been stuck on the market for 18 months?"; "Why do others get promotions and I'm stuck in my job with no hope of doing better in the future?"; Why do others have happy marriages while mine is so utterly boring?" One man expressed his despair in these striking words, "I feel like an empty jug sitting on the back shelf of life. I've been forgotten by God and life is passing me by. I'm in a rut so deep that there isn't a ladder tall enough for me to climb out. Every day I ask God, 'Is this all there is to life?' Once I even asked Him why He lied to me. I said, 'God, you said you would bless me. Did you run out of blessings before you got to me? My Christian life isn't what you said it would be. Why?'"

Many people do not see God's blessings in their lives because they do not know what to look for. Let me ask you a question, "Why were you born?" Why did God allow you to come into existence? Someone with your I.Q., your athletic ability, your personality, your body shape, your disposition – why you? *Ephesians 1:4 – Long before he laid down earth's foundation, He had us in mind and settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love.*" You came into existence by the grace of God, you continue to exist by the grace of God, and you will last forever in His new world because His grace continues forever.

God knows you completely and loves you just as you are. The greatest spiritual discovery of your life will be the day you transition from singing, "Jesus loves me this I know." to "Jesus knows me this I love!" Jeremiah said, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."* – *Jeremiah 1:5* Before I was a twinkle in my father's eye God knew me, knew what successes and failures I would have, knew by strengths and my weaknesses, knew the sins I would wrestle with and the spiritual victories I would enjoy. To Moses God said, *"I am pleased with you and I know you by name."* Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me."*

Some people choose to be intimidated by the fact that God knows you. One of the things I dislike about being a preacher is being treated differently from other people. You get called by some titles that you don't deserve or you get treated like you don't have the same emotions others have or sometimes if people catch themselves saying something in your presence they shouldn't be saying (it may be off color or profane or not true) and then they remember you are a preacher they will apologize to you. I've never been comfortable with that. Why should anyone apologize to me when they offend God? I want people to understand I am one of God's children just like them and we are equal in God's sight. One of the first times that happened to me was at

a civic club meeting and a fellow began telling a joke that really wasn't appropriate anywhere. He stopped right in the middle of it and said, "Excuse me preacher." and then he went on and finished his joke. When he finished I said, "Did you think I was going to tell God on you?" He gave me a strange look and said, "What do you mean?" I replied, "You said "Excuse me preacher." and then went on and told the joke. Did you think I was going to tell God on you? He said, "Well, I think God sees and hears everything and He already knows." I said, "I do too. So if you are going to go ahead and do it why are you apologizing to me? If you are going to apologize why don't you apologize to God? You are making me greater than God!" (He doesn't sit by me anymore at club meetings. I guess my words were too direct.) A lot of people are intimidated by the fact that God knows them and that's why they apologize to preachers. It's a way of saying, "I'm going to go ahead and speak inappropriately but maybe if I apologize to a preacher God will get the message that I am a little conscience stricken by saying what I'm about to say."

It ought to make you feel extremely loved and secure to know that God knows you so well and he knew it before he decided to create you. The Bible says you are engraved on the palms of his hands. You are never out of His mind. He knows the best and the worst about you and still you are the focus of his love! You have been chosen by God for special blessing.

It's a very special thing to be chosen by God. Back in the days of Abraham there was very little interaction between God and man. One day, out of the blue, God said to Abraham, *Leave you country, your people, your father's house and go to a land that I will show you.* " Just to be spoken to directly by God was incredible but to hear God promise, *And when you do what I tell you to do I am going to bless you uniquely. I will make of you a great nation and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you curse those who curse you and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.* What a day for Abraham. To be told by God, "You are special!"

We are today beginning a study of Ephesians and looking at just 2 brief verses. As you hear these 2 verses listen as a descendant of Abraham, one of his offspring through whom all the families of the earth are being blessed. *How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. – Ephesians 1:3-4* Please notice that phrase, *He had us in mind.* In spite of your shortcomings and inconsistencies God had you in mind to be a source of blessing to all the families of the earth.

You have a choice. You can spend your life trying to discover your identity or you can accept the identity God provides you as one of his chosen. God takes great pleasure in you. He is absolutely determined to performing good in your life. Remember the words of Psalm 23, *Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.* There is a great promise given to us in Jeremiah 32, *I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them....I will rejoice in doing them good....* When the prophet Zephaniah wrote about God and

his attitude toward us he said, *God rejoices over us in song*. Can you imagine hearing God sing and sing about you! John Piper describes how he hears God's song in his book, *The Pleasures of God*, "What do you hear when you imagine the voice of God singing? I hear the booming of Niagara Falls mingled with the trickle of a mossy mountain stream. I hear the blast of Mt. St. Helens mingled with a kitten's purr. I hear the power of an east coast hurricane and the barely audible puff of night snow in the woods. And I hear the unimaginable roar of the sun, 865,000 miles thick, 1,300,000 times bigger than the earth, and nothing but fire 1,000,000 degrees centigrade on the cooler surface of the corona but I hear this unimaginable roar mingled with the tender warm crackling of logs in the living room on a cozy winter's night. I stand dumbfounded, staggered, and speechless that He is singing over me, one who has dishonored him so many times in so many ways. It is almost too good to be true. He is rejoicing over my good with all his heart and all his soul. He virtually breaks forth into song when He hits upon a new way to do me good." God sings over you!

If you are searching for something to fill your life with meaning I am here to tell you only God's blessing will give you peace that lasts. This great book of Ephesians is what God has done and wants to do for us.

One day Jesus arrived at that pool at Bethesda and he was the anguished looks of those who sat and suffered. Time stood still for that crippled man at the pool until Jesus came and looked at him lying on his mat and he asked him the strangest question. He asked, "Do you want to get well?" If Jesus asked you that question today would you respond "Yes" or "Yes, but?" The lame man responded, "Yes, but." "Yes but I have no one to put me in the pool." He focused on what couldn't happen rather than what could. How about you? Do you want God to bless your life? "Yes, but my parents, my children, my time-pressures, my ex..." Do you want God to bless you or not? When the lame man whined, "Yes but I have no man to put me in the pool.", Jesus didn't respond with, "Well, bless your heart, let's get a committee of volunteers to be on standby for you when you need them." He just seems to have ignored the excuse all together.

Nothing positive can happen in your life as long as you are fixated on the reasons that you are not being blessed. Eventually in that story the lame man must have turned to Jesus and said, "Yes! Yes, I want to get well!"

You can choose today to live with hope and to expect God's blessings to shower down on your life. Or you can choose to go away today just as miserable as when you came, wondering why God blesses all those other people and not you. Maybe those other folks, the ones who are blessed, aren't just lucky. Maybe they trust God and let Him bless them. Maybe when they hear him ask, "Do you want to get well?" they shout back in gratitude, "Yes!"

God wants to bless you with the greatest of all spiritual blessings today – the gift of salvation. During this invitation song I pray you will hear Jesus asking you, "Do you want to get well?"